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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: PRESIDENT NAZARBAYEV SIGNS MADRID  
LEGISLATION, REACTION MUTED THUS FAR

REF: (A) 08 ASTANA 2388  
(B) 08 ASTANA 2256

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (U) In following through on Kazakhstan's Madrid commitments on  
democratic reform, President Nazarbayev signed into law new  
legislation on political parties and the media on February 6 and  
legislation on elections on February 9.

¶3. (SBU) The public reaction to the legislation's signing has been  
somewhat muted thus far, perhaps because most news outlets are still  
focused on the February 4 devaluation of Kazakhstan's currency.  
Most civil society activists have not publicly reacted to the  
signing. However, Tamara Kaleyeva, the head of the respected media  
watchdog NGO "Adil Soz," said that although she would have liked to  
see the new media law go further, it is nevertheless "a step towards  
further democratization." Kazakhstan's opposition parties, several  
of whom previously called on Nazarbayev to veto the laws, have  
stayed unusually silent since he signed the legislation. The  
leaders of the Azat party were the only ones to make a statement,  
publicizing their criticism of the laws and announcing that the  
party will hold protest rallies on February 21.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: Even if the new laws do not go as far as we --  
or some of Kazakhstan's opposition and civil society leaders --  
would have liked, they represent a step forward on the long path  
toward democratization. We should recognize this, while continuing  
to press Kazakhstan for further progress, including Kazakhstan's  
continued cooperation with the OSCE and ODIHR in bringing its laws  
better in line with OSCE standards. The new legislation is also a  
victory for President Nazarbayev's more liberal advisors, including  
Foreign Minister Tazhin and State Secretary Saudabayev. Progress on  
the Madrid commitments was stalled during the first half of 2008,  
until Nazarbayev publicly commented on them for the first time in a  
June 29, 2008, address to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Astana  
-- a step which the liberals apparently persuaded him to take.  
After then, the bureaucracy stepped up to the plate, and the  
legislation began to move forward. END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND